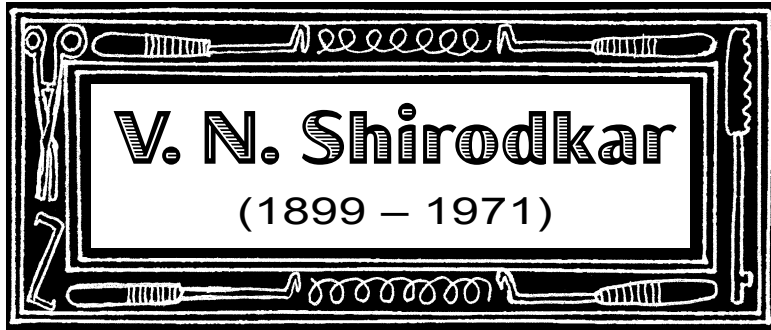
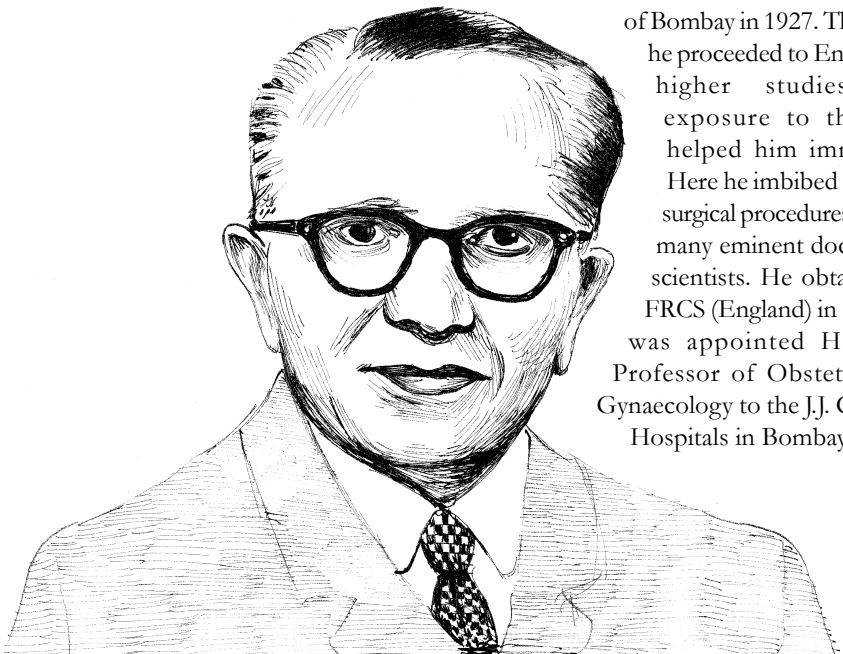




Dr. V. N. Shirodkar's name is famous the world over as the inventor of the *Shirodkar Stitch*. As a medical surgeon he made very important contributions in the field of women's diseases.

Vithal Nagesh Shirodkar was born in 1899 in the village of Shiroda in Goa from which his family derived its name. He was educated in Hubli and completed his medical training at the Grant Medical College in Bombay. He passed the final MBBS exam in 1923. He specialised in Obstetrics and Gynaecology and

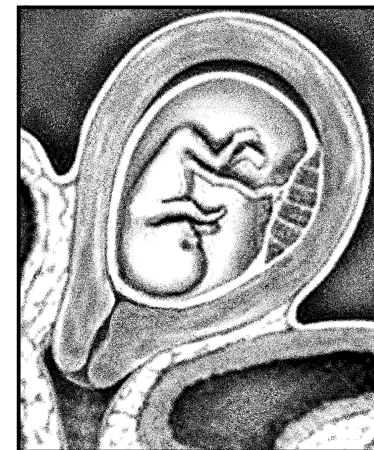
received the MD from the University of Bombay in 1927. There after he proceeded to England for higher studies. The exposure to the West helped him immensely. Here he imbibed the latest surgical procedures and met many eminent doctors and scientists. He obtained the FRCS (England) in 1931 and was appointed Honorary Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology to the J.J. Group of Hospitals in Bombay.



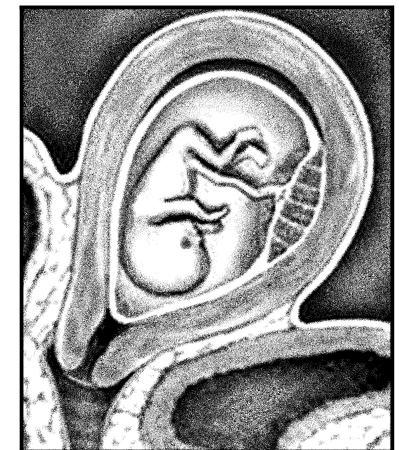
The J.J. Hospital is unique and probably one of the largest in the world with over 4,000 beds; 1,500 undergraduate and 650 postgraduate students. It is one of the oldest medical institutions of modern medicine in Asia and has a history stretching over 175 years. The legendary Robert Koch – who won the Nobel Prize for his pioneering research on tuberculosis, worked in this very institution at the turn of the century.

Shirodkar was appointed Honorary Professor of Midwifery and Gynaecology at the Grant Medical College in 1940. He was also attached to the Nowrosjee Wadia Maternity Hospital in 1941. He had a flourishing private practice – in which he catered to all segments of the society – both rich and poor. He worked 14 to 16 hours a day at his clinic in Cumballa Hill, Bombay. He rarely operated without an audience of keen observers. He gained international recognition and lectured widely, being one of the first to show films of his operations. He devised two operations for genital prolapse, and is reported to have done more tuboplasties than any other surgeon in the world!

In the 1950's spontaneous miscarriage during the second trimester was still a mystery. Many therapies were prescribed but none yielded satisfactory results. This relatively rare but distressing problem called for some refreshingly fresh insights. Professor Shirodkar was just the right person to look at this problem critically. He studied the cervix in non-pregnant and pregnant states and tried to understand the changes in anatomy and physiology. He was particularly interested in the changing nature of the cervix in normal pregnancy from a fibrous one to a dynamic muscular organ. His answer to the problem of habitual abortion was a surgery which put him and India firmly on the world map of operative Obstetrics and Gynaecology.

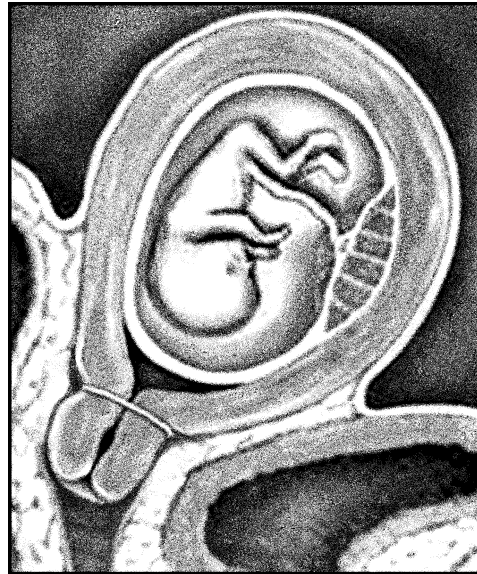


The muscular cervix is closed in a normal uterus.



In an incompetent uterus, the cervix is open.

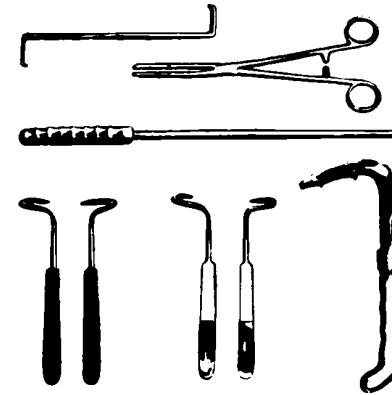
In 1955, Dr. Shirodkar described the cervical cerclage operation, a surgery which has stood the greatest test of all – time. He designed special instruments for the repair of the incompetent cervix. There have been a number of modifications but the original surgery still remains a masterpiece. He described his operation at an international seminar in Paris in 1951 and in Naples in 1956. The Italian connection was, of course, strengthened by the fact that a Hollywood star was also successfully operated by the same technique. He was astute enough to realize that his operation was not a panacea for all habitual abortions. He clearly laid out the conditions where the operation was most likely to be useful and where it would not work.



*The Shirodkar stitch keeps the cervix closed so that the pregnancy in an incompetent uterus can continue for the full term.*

The operation and the thought behind it probably came from Dr. Shirodkar's keen sense of questioning everything that was routine. He wrote in the preface to his monograph, *"With all due respects to the old masters, I did not reconcile myself to some of the operative procedures which fell far short of the ideal; ideas came to my mind for improving the time-honoured methods."*

At the Silver Jubilee Celebration of the French Society of Gynaecology in June 1951, Professor Shirodkar showed a film demonstrating an operation to place a ligature comprising three strands of catgut around the cervix. Shirodkar soon found that catgut was inadequate because of its solubility. He modified his technique by using a strip of *fascia lata* from the thigh and linen sutures for the treatment of habitual abortion in the second trimester. This is now universally called the *Shirodkar Operation* for which posterity will always remember him.



*These are some of the tools that Dr. Shirodkar invented for his surgery.*

Shirodkar wrote numerous papers for medical journals. In 1960, he published *Contributions to Obstetrics and Gynaecology* based on his personal experience. He contributed a chapter on *Incompetent Cervix* in Volumes IV and V of *Progress in Gynaecology* by Meigs and Sturgis in 1963 and 1970. His views on genital prolapse found expression in the chapter entitled *A New Approach to the Understanding of the Anatomy and Treatment of Uterine Prolapse* in *Advances in Obstetrics and Gynaecology* by Marcus and Marcus in 1967. He wrote about his technique of placing a vaginal hood over the cervix as a

method of contraception or sterilization.

Professor Shirodkar died in Bombay on March 7, 1971. Dr. Shirodkar's mother died of cervical cancer. This inspired Dr. Shirodkar's son Manohar Shirodkar to spend his career studying the viral causes of the illness. Initially he worked at the John Hopkins School of Public Health studying the *Rous sarcoma* virus, the first virus discovered to cause solid cancer. He subsequently worked at The Virus Research Centre of the Rockefeller Foundation in Pune, India.

As a young man, Manohar Shirodkar turned away from a career as a clinician, yet he always admired his eminent father. In 1976, Manohar and his wife, Sudha, founded the Dr. V.N. Shirodkar Memorial Research Foundation, an organization that embodied the dreams of both Manohar Shirodkar and his father. The organization screens underprivileged women for cervical cancer and investigates novel antiviral biological agents to treat virus diseases.

Besides being a busy practitioner Professor V. N. Shirodkar published widely and took a keen interest in social medicine. He was a member of the Shantilal Shah Committee on abortions and also established the Family Planning Association in India. In 1971, the Government of India honoured him with the Padma Vibhushan award.